



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Sunday, October 16-22 (B) – Hebrews 5:1-10

Focus: *Perfection!*

word of life

“Although he (Jesus) was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him ...” Hebrews 5:8-9 (NRSV)

Read Hebrews 5:1-10

The theme of Jesus as the uniquely qualified high priest permeates the appointed readings for the next five weeks. The reading for today articulates how Jesus is qualified to be in such a role.

1. *What do you know about the role of the high priest in Jewish ritual and liturgy?*

The high priest’s role was to act on behalf of the faith community – to offer sacrifices for his sins and the sins of his people – and to serve as a bridge between God and humanity. On the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) the high priest entered the Holy of Holies in the temple and offered sacrifices on behalf of the community of faith. The high priest was not an elected or elective position; one couldn’t decide to run for high priest. Rather, it was seen as a calling from God. (Hebrews 5:4)

2. *What roles in the church today are considered to be calls from God?*
3. *How are these calls discerned?*

The author of Hebrews shows Jesus as uniquely called by God to serve in this role because of his calling as a Son. “You are my Son, today I have begotten you.” (Hebrews 5:5, echoing Psalm 2:7 NRSV) This calling is validated by connecting Jesus as high priest to “the order of Melchizedek.” (Hebrews 5:6, 9)

Aside from the book of Hebrews, Melchizedek is mentioned only two other places in the Bible (Genesis 14:18-20 and Psalm 110:4). The name literally means “the King of righteousness.” Melchizedek is described as “priest of God Most High” as he blesses Abram. (Genesis 14:18) The one chosen by God is appointed a priest forever “according to the order of Melchizedek.” (Psalm 110:4) The significance of this designation for Jesus is to identify Jesus as the perfect high priest whose authority precedes the priestly lineage of Aaron and the Levites. Jesus is the high priest of God Most High.

4. *Had you heard of Melchizedek before reading this lesson?*
5. *What do you know about him?*

The second qualification Jesus uniquely fulfills as high priest is in his obedience through suffering. As the great high priest, he knows the sins of the people. He knows human suffering, offering up “prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears.” (Hebrews 5:7 NRSV) But unlike an earthly high priest, Jesus is fully obedient in his suffering to the will of God. “... he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.” (Hebrews 5:8 NRSV) The word “perfect” might better be translated “complete” or “fulfilled.” We hear echoes of Jesus’ last words on the cross in the Gospel of John: “It is finished.” (John 19:30 NSRV)

6. *How is obedience learned through suffering?*
7. *Does the imagery of Jesus as the great high priest resonate for the Christian? Why or why not?*

Jesus as high priest accomplishes what we cannot on our own do: he is perfectly obedient in his suffering, thereby giving us eternal salvation.

word among us

Every four years, the world's attention is drawn to petite young women doing incredible things. The gymnastics venue at the Olympics is often filled with spectators to watch the Olympiads perform amazing routines. Every movement, every step, every gesture is evaluated. The goal is perfection – everything done with grace and artistry. But we rarely, if ever, see a perfect score. No matter how many years the athletes have trained, the judges still find something to critique.

1. *What are some other examples of people striving for perfection?*
2. *Is it humanly possible to be “perfect” in an endeavor?*

The author of Hebrews recognized that “no one is perfect,” not even the person chosen by God for the most sacred of positions – that of high priest. “... He (The high priest) must offer sacrifice for his sins as well as for those of the people.” (Hebrews 5:3 NRSV) The same is true today. Your pastor, your bishop, the leaders in your congregation, you and me – we all, left to our own devices, fall short. No matter how many years we train and strive for perfection, we still succumb to our weaknesses. We confess this as we gather for worship as we pray: “We confess we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves.”

3. *What does it mean to be captive to sin?*
4. *How does it feel to not have to be perfect?*

But the Good News from the letter to the Hebrews is that there is One who knows our weakness, yet remained obedient. Through Jesus's suffering and obedience to God's will, Jesus was made perfect “... and became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him ...” (Hebrews 5:9 NRSV) Jesus completes our incompleteness. Jesus bridges the gap between us and God.

5. *How does Jesus complete your incompleteness?*

faith practice in daily life

Hear God's word and share in the Lord's Supper

It happens at every baptism, whether we are aware of it or not. Something broken is made whole; something incomplete finds completion. That “something” is you and me. As we gather around the font, we are reminded that we are born “children of a fallen humanity; but by water and the Holy Spirit we are reborn children of God and made members of the church, the body of Christ.” (Holy Baptism liturgy, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 227)

In our baptism, we are joined and connected to the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This connection is so strong that it lasts forever and brings us forgiveness, wholeness, and salvation. The connection frees us to live and grow “... in faith, love, and obedience to the will of God.” (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 227)

6. *In what ways do we grow in obedience to the will of God?*
7. *What does your baptism mean to you?*

Prayer

We thank you, O God, for giving us forgiveness, salvation, and wholeness through Jesus Christ, your Son, the Great High Priest. Amen

last word

As you begin each day this week,
give thanks for your baptism.